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Keeping Gaspesians Informed

A new chapter begins for the SCFG

NELSON **SERGERIE**
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

NEW RICHMOND – The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) has reached another milestone with the end of its cement transshipment operations in New Richmond after nine years of service.

The last railcar of cement transferred in New Richmond was handed over to Canadian National (CN) on July 8 in Matapedia. Since then, all cement produced at the Port-Daniel-Gascons cement plant and shipped by rail has been transported directly from Port Daniel to Matapedia.

"We started in the summer of 2017, and yes, this marks the end of an era," says the company's president, Éric Dubé.

During that period, 10,975 railcars were hauled between New Richmond and Matapedia, following the transshipment of cement between Port Daniel and New Richmond.

Photo: SCFG

The last truck deliverd cement to New Richmond on July 6.

The company invested $300,000 to install a cement silo in New Richmond, an operation that generated approximately $20 million in gross revenue over nine years.

"That's 25,437 truck trips that left Port Daniel and headed to New Richmond. The numbers speak for themselves!" says the president.

Nearly one million metric tonnes of cement were moved by truck during that time.

The cement plant has since invested about $12 million in its own loading facilities.

"We understand that this isn't the same type of equipment. Their system is designed to handle higher volumes and load our railcars quickly," says Mr. Dubé.

Depending on production and sales, between 20 and 60 railcars of cement will now leave Port-Daniel-Gascons by rail each week.

"We're still making between two and four round trips per week. The logistical challenge is that this extends our transit time, and regulations have created the constraint of having to transport cargo 24 hours a day. We understand the inconveniences and are looking for solutions, but they're purely financial. We're working with our partner to minimize these negative impacts," says Mr. Dubé.

Each time railcars are transferred between the company and CN in Matapedia, every car must be inspected individually.

"That's why we face delays and have to transport them at night. If CN picks up our railcars in Matapedia at 6 p.m., they need to be there by 2 p.m. so that CN can inspect them. There's a whole safety and technical aspect to this that causes delays. It's not there for no reason. It's to protect both employees and the public. Canada was built on rail, and safety will remain the priority," says Mr. Dubé.

Although the line has been fully operational since reopening in January, work continues on upgrading railway crossings.

Cont'd on Page 7

SCFG:

Cont'd from Page 6

“The major challenges are no longer with the track itself; they’re really with the railroad crossings. We still have work to do on them until the end of the year. There are still mandatory speed reductions at certain crossings, but that allows us to remain operational. We’re loading our cars to capacity and running our trains within a reasonable timeframe,” explains the president.

Once the crossing work is complete, trains will be able to operate at full track speed.

“We could write a book about all the obstacles and challenges we’ve faced along the way, but today, thanks to the hard work and dedication of SCFG’s (La Société de chemin de fer de la Gaspésie) staff, the results speak for themselves: the train is now running all the way to Port Daniel,” the company notes on social media.

Focus remains on reaching Gaspé

Following the reopening of Section 2 between Caplan and Port-Daniel-Gascons in January, extending rail service to Gaspé remains the company's long-term objective.

Mr. Dubé says the success of the cement operation demonstrates how rail could support future mining projects, including the possible revival of Mines Gaspé.

“We were very pleased with the announcements regarding the resumption of work on the two construction sites along Section 3. There will be an election campaign. This will be part of our demands. A new government will be elected, and we’ll make another push so that in the next budget, in March 2027, the necessary funds reappear in the Quebec Infrastructure Plan,” comments Mr. Dubé.

He also points to the growing resource estimate at Osisko's mining project, now estimated at two billion metric tonnes of mineralized rocks.

“This is our mission. With 11,000 railcars of cement, that’s 25,000 truck trips to Port Daniel and New Richmond. Without rail, imagine the volume if it all had to go by road? That gives us strong grounds to justify upgrading the rail line,” he argues.

Preparations for the next phase of the project have been slowed by the Quebec government engineers' strike.

“They’re following political directives. My role is to ensure that the political side is there and then to work on fostering collaboration between the company and the Ministry of Transportation,” Mr. Dubé concludes.